

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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15 January 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THROUGH: Mr. Paul C. Warnke, ASD/ISA

Dr. Morton H. Halperin, DASD/Policy Planning and Arms Control/ISA

SUBJECT: Final Report, OSD Vietnam Task Force

On June 17, 1967, Secretary Robert S. McNamara directed that a Task Force be formed to study the history of United States involvement in Vietnam from World War II to the present. Mr. McNamara's guidance was simply to do studies that were "encyclopedic and objective." With six full-time professionals assigned to the Task Force, we were to complete our work in three months. A year and a half later, and with the involvement of six times six professionals, we are finally done to the tune of thirty-seven studies and fifteen collections of documents contained in forty-three volumes.

In the beginning, Mr. McNamara gave the Task Force full access to OSD files, and the Task Force received access to CIA materials, and some use of State Department cables and memoranda. We had no access to White House files. Our guidance prohibited personal interviews with any of the principal participants.

The result was not so much a documentary history, as a history based solely on documents -- checked and rechecked with ant-like diligence. Pieces of paper, formidable and suggestive by themselves, could have meant much or nothing. Perhaps this document was never sent anywhere, and perhaps that one, though commented upon, was irrelevant. Without the memories of people to tell us, we were certain to make mistakes. Yet, using those memories might have been misleading as well. This approach to research was bound to lead to distortions, and distortions we are sure abound in these studies.

To bring the documents to life, to fill in gaps, and just to see what the "outside world" was thinking, we turned to newspapers, periodicals, and books. We never used these sources to supplant the classified documents, but only to supplement them. And because these documents, sometimes written by very clever men who knew so much and desired to say only a part and sometimes written very openly but also contradictorily, are not immediately self-revealing or self-explanatory, we tried both to have a number of researchers look at them and to quote passages liberally. Moreover, when we felt we could be challenged with taking something out of context, we included the whole paper in the Documentary Record section of the Task Force studies (Parts V and VI. A and B). Again seeking to fend off inevitable mistakes in interpretation and content, what seemed to us key documents were reviewed and included in several overlapping in substance, but separate, studies.

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... people who worked on the Task Force were superb--uniformly bright and interested. ... had a sense of doing something important and of the need to do it right. Of course, we all had our prejudices and axes to grind and these shine through clearly at times, but we tried, we think, to suppress or compensate for them.

These outstanding people came from everywhere--the military services, State, OSD, and the "think tanks." Some came for a month, for three months, for six months, and most were unable, given the unhappiness of their superiors, to finish the studies they began. Almost all the studies had several authors, each heir dutifully trying to pick up the threads of his predecessor. In all, we had thirty-six professionals working on these studies, with an average of four months per man.

The quality, style and interest of the studies varies considerably. The papers in Parts I, II, III, and IV.A, concerning the years 1945 to 1961 tend to be generally non-startling--although there are many interesting tidbits. Because many of the documents in this period were lost or not kept (except for the Geneva Conference era) we had to rely more on outside resources. From 1961 onwards (Parts IV.B and C and VI.C), the records were bountiful, especially on the first Kennedy year in office, the Diem coup, and on the subjects of the deployment of ground forces, the decisions surrounding the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, US-GVN relations, and attempts at negotiating a settlement of the conflict.

Almost all the studies contain both a Summary and Analysis and a Chronology. The chronologies highlight each important event or action in the monograph by means of date, description, and documentary source. The Summary and Analysis sections, which I wrote, attempt to capture the main themes and facts of the monographs--and to make some judgments and speculations which may or may not appear in the text itself. The monographs themselves stick, by and large, to the documents and do not tend to be analytical.

Writing history, especially where it blends into current events, especially where that current event is Vietnam, is a treacherous exercise. We could not go into the minds of the decision-makers, we were not present at the decisions, and we often could not tell whether something happened because someone decided it, decided against it, or most likely because it unfolded from the situation. History, to me, has been expressed by a passage from Herman Melville's Moby Dick where he writes: "This is a world of chance, free will, and necessity -- all interweavingly working together as one; chance by turn rules either and has the last featuring blow at events." Our studies have tried to reflect this thought; inevitably in the organizing and writing process, they appear to assign more and less to men and free will than was the case.

Encl - Outline of Studies

Leslie H. Gelb
LESLIE H. GELB
Chairman, OSD Task Force

I. 8 May 1969 NLF 10-Points

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II. 9 May 69

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Proceeding from a desire to reach a political solution with a view to ending the U.S. imperialists' war of aggression in South Vietnam and helping restore peace in Vietnam; on the basis of the guarantee of the fundamental national rights of the Vietnamese people; proceeding from the fundamental principles of the 1954 Geneva agreements on Vietnam and the actual situation in Vietnam; on the basis of the political programme and the 5-point position of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, which keep with the 4-point stand of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation sets forth the principles and main content of an overall solution to the South Vietnam problem to help restore peace in Vietnam as follows:

1. To respect the Vietnamese people's fundamental national rights, i. e. independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, as recognized by the 1954 Geneva agreements on Vietnam.
2. The U.S. Government must withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. troops, military personnel, arms and war materiel, and all troops, military personnel, arms and war materiel of the other foreign countries of the U.S. camp without posing any condition whatsoever; liquidate all U.S. military bases in South Vietnam; renounce all encroachments on the sovereignty, territory and security of South Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
3. The Vietnamese people's right to fight for the defence of their fatherland is the sacred, inalienable right to self-defence of all peoples. The question of the Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam shall be resolved by the Vietnamese parties among themselves.
4. The people of South Vietnam settle themselves their own affairs without foreign interference. They decide themselves the political regime of South Vietnam through free and democratic general elections. Through free and democratic general elections, a constituent assembly will be set up, a constitution worked out, and a coalition government of South Vietnam installed, reflecting national concord and the broad union of all social strata.
5. During the period intervening between the restoration of peace and the holding of general elections, neither party shall impose its political regime on the people of South Vietnam. The political forces representing the various social strata and political tendencies in South Vietnam that stand for peace, independence and neutrality, including those persons who, for political reasons, have to live abroad, will enter into talks to set up a provisional coalition government based on the principle of equality, democracy and mutual respect with a view to achieving a peaceful, independent, democratic and neutral South Vietnam. The provisional coalition government is to have the following tasks:
 - a) To implement the agreements to be concluded on the withdrawal of the troops of the United States and the other foreign countries of the American camp, etc.
 - b) To achieve national concord, and a broad union of all social strata, political forces, nationalities, religious communities, and all persons, no matter what their political belief and their past may be, provided they stand for peace, independence and neutrality.
 - c) To achieve broad democratic freedoms--freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of gathering, freedom of belief, freedom to form political parties and organizations, freedom to demonstrate, etc.; to set free those persons jailed on political grounds; to prohibit all acts of terror, reprisal and discrimination.

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d) To heal the war wounds, to restore and develop the economy, to restore the normal life of the people, and to improve the living conditions of the labouring people.

e) To hold free and democratic general elections in the whole of South Vietnam with a view to achieving the South Vietnam people's right to self-determination, in accordance with the content of point 4 mentioned above.

6--South Vietnam will carry out a foreign policy of peace and neutrality:

To carry out a policy of good neighbourly relations with the Kingdom of Cambodia on the basis of respect for her independence, sovereignty, neutrality and territorial integrity within her present borders; to carry out a policy of good neighbourly relations with the Kingdom of Laos on the basis of respect for the 1962 Geneva agreements on Laos. To establish diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with all countries, irrespective of political and social regime, including the United States, in accordance with the five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence; to accept economic and technical aid with no political conditions attached from any country.

7--The reunification of Vietnam will be achieved step by step, by peaceful means, through discussions and agreement between the two zones, without foreign interference.

Pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, the two zones reestablish normal relations in all fields on the basis of mutual respect. .

The military demarcation line between the two zones at the 17th parallel, as provided for by the 1954 Geneva agreements, is only of a provisional character and does not constitute in any way a political or territorial boundary.

The two zones reach agreement on the statute of the demilitarized zone, and work out modalities for movements across the provisional military demarcation line.

8--As provided for in the 1954 Geneva agreements on Vietnam, pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, the two zones north and south of Vietnam undertake to refrain from joining any military alliance with foreign countries, not to allow any foreign country to maintain military bases, troops and military personnel on their respective soil, and not to recognize the protection of any country or military alliance or bloc.

9--To resolve the aftermath of the war:

a) The parties will negotiate the release of the armymen captured in war.

b) The U.S. Government must bear full responsibility for the losses and devastations it has caused to the Vietnamese people in both zones.

10--The parties shall reach agreement on an international supervision about the withdrawal from South Vietnam of the troops, military personnel, arms and war materiel of the United States and the other foreign countries of the American camp.

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The principles and content of the overall solution expounded above form an integrated whole. On the basis of these principles and content, the parties shall reach understanding to the effect of concluding agreements on the above-mentioned questions with a view to ending the war in South Vietnam, and contributing to restore peace in Vietnam.

The overall solution put forward by the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation fully meets the national rights of the Vietnamese people and the interests of world peace.

The South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, which has organized and led the South Vietnamese people in their struggle against U.S. aggression, is the authentic representative of the South Vietnam people, fully competent to settle all problems relating to South Vietnam. The aforesaid overall solution to the South Vietnam problem proposed by the NLFV once again demonstrated our correct position, and our consistent goodwill and serious intent.

This overall solution ensures the fundamental national rights of the Vietnamese people and the right to self-determination of the South Vietnam people. It ensures a lasting peace in Vietnam. It embodies the spirit of broad national concord of the South Vietnam people and the national front in Indo-China and Southeast Asia, responds to the aspirations for peace of American people as well as the world's people. This solution creates conditions for the United States to put an honourable end to its war, a war which is costly in human life and property, unpopular and prejudicial to the U.S. prestige.

The South Vietnam National Front for Liberation is firmly confident that the people of both South and North Vietnam, standing shoulder to shoulder in their common struggle for independence, freedom and peace, will no doubt wholeheartedly support this overall solution.

The South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, which is closely united with the Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces, believes that because of its policy of broad national union and concord, all religious, political, social and cultural organizations in South Vietnam, all political forces and Vietnamese residents abroad will warmly hail this solution; and the national-minded members of the Saigon army and administration will sympathize with it.

The people and governments of the socialist countries and of the peace- and justice-loving countries; the peace and democratic organizations in this world, which have always given glorious support to the South Vietnam people's resistance war against U.S. aggression for national salvation, will surely support the overall solution to the South Vietnam problem put forward by the National Front for Liberation. Together with the progressive people in the United States, those American personalities, intellectuals and clergymen who have voiced their opposition to the U.S. unjust war in Vietnam, and those American servicemen who are fed up with the war of aggression and who desire to be rapidly brought home, will no doubt sympathize with this solution too.

The overall solution to the South Vietnam problem we have expounded above is very logical and reasonable. The United States Government must adopt a serious attitude. It must put an end to its war of aggression, abandon its manoeuvre of maintaining neo-colonialism in South Vietnam, and respect the right of the Vietnamese people to settle themselves their internal affairs, without foreign interference.

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